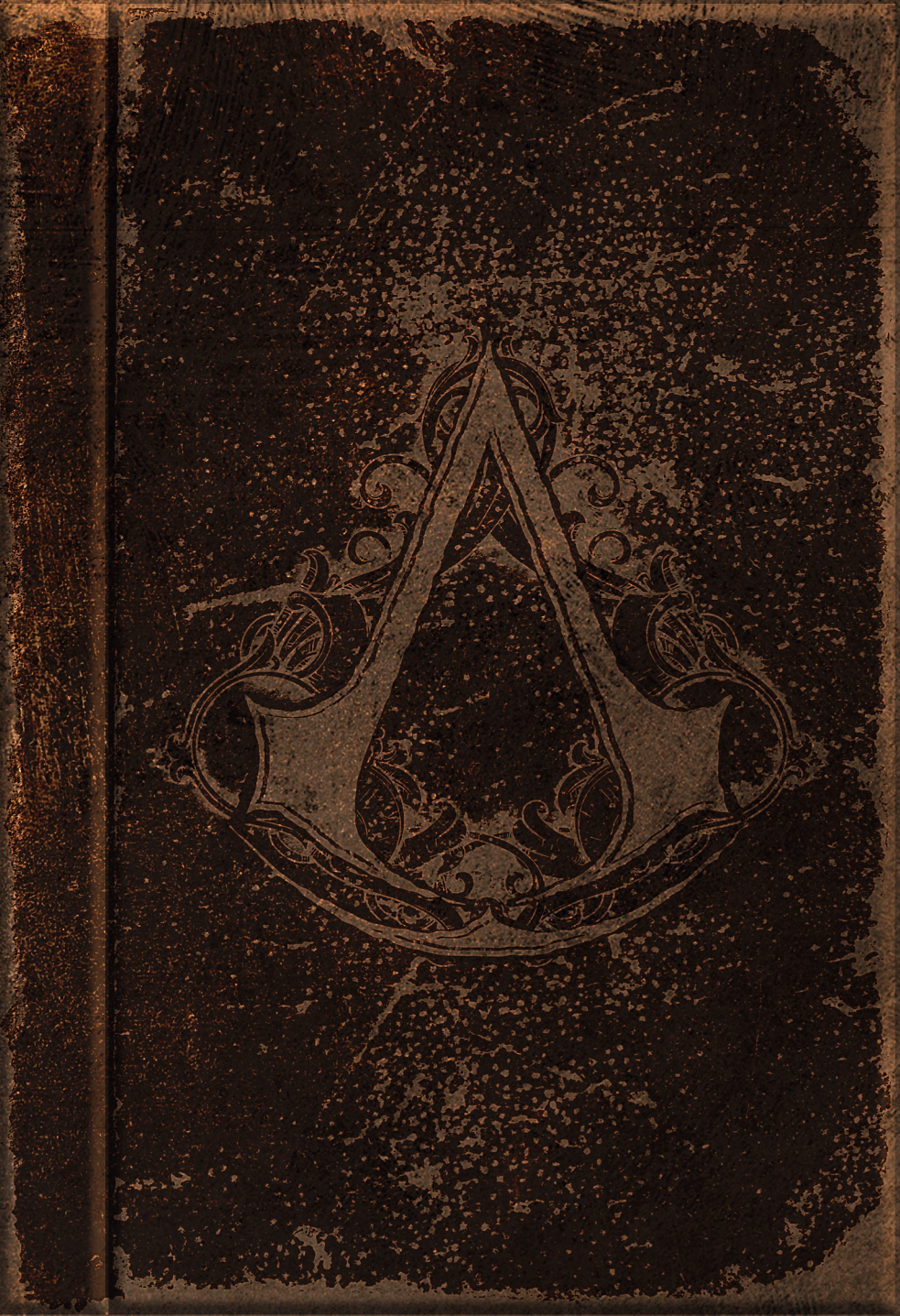


14th December 1799,

My death has not yet quite arrived, but it is near and as inevitable as night follows day. I have felt myself decline for a long time now, but I fear not death. This is what I told Doctor Craik when leaving him instructions to stop the vain attempts that can only delay the inevitable. Soon, I shall join my dearest Martha

The events of my life have swept me towards a destiny I could never have expected as a young man, when I was simply trying to provide for my family following the death of our father. I have had the honour of doing what few men have done – give birth to a nation. I have fought, first as a soldier, then as president, to forge this nation, to make it strong. And strong it has become, so strong that no force exists that could make it disappear. Even on the brink of death, I feel pride in this.

With the little strength I have left, I am adding these few words to the notebook I have kept all my life. It tells of events known by all, and others that have remained secret. Who will read these words? I especially think of Connor, the mysterious man who played such a surprising role in my destiny, and that of the nation – – –

Who will read my strange story?

The map of the thirteen American states, neatly arranged along the east coast... I am fascinated by the immensity of the countryside remaining to be explored on our continent...

My Virginian compatriots. Brave, simple folk - farmers, woodcutters. I admire their tenacity.

20th March 1748

I enjoyed school, but had to leave this autumn, just before turning sixteen. Since the death of my father four years ago, our lives have become difficult, and I must help my family.

These last two years, I have studied geometry, trigonometry, logarithms. I am drawn to the precision of numbers, the power they give us to find the best solution to any problem.

I was introduced to Lord Fairfax by my dear brother Lawrence. Lord Fairfax is an extraordinary man, one of the most powerful landowners in all of Virginia. It seems he took a liking to me, offering me work as a surveyor on his land. He told me that my riding skills and love of mathematics mean I am perfectly able to do this sort of task. The offer is a good opportunity for me. I am soon to leave for the northern frontier of Virginia, in the valleys of the Allegheny Mountains. Lord Fairfax owns an enormous amount of land there, much of it still unexploited. My work will to be map the region and define lots so that new plantations can be set up.

The trip will be rough - I must cross the Alleghany Mountains and a desert before arriving in this savage land, thick with Indians whose hospitality is uncertain. This time, mother has agreed to let me leave.

15th August 1752

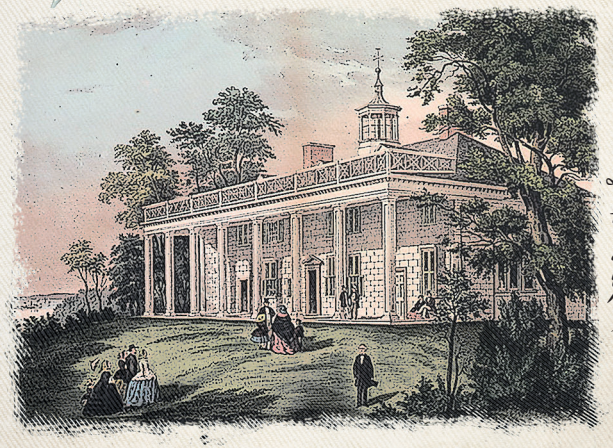
There are times when a man can but watch, stupefied, as the happiness and misery of his destiny closely intertwine. I am only twenty years of age, but in the space of four years my reputation as a surveyor has grown, and I have earned a comfortable amount to provide for my family. This reputation has inspired the government of Virginia, which knows my taste for action and military affairs, to name me adjutant general. It is an immense honour that I also partly owe to the support of Lord Fairfax.

It is currently my duty to assemble and train the militia who will defend the frontiers of our district against both the encroachment of the French and the ravages caused by the Indians. However, the success I have in this domain is overshadowed by sorrow – my brother Lawrence has just died. I loved and admired him so much.

He was the most affectionate, upstanding and dignified brother that anyone could have asked for. He was only 37, and has left me his estate on Mount Vernon.

Now I must face managing Mount Vernon in addition to my military duties. And so I ready myself for the combat that awaits, plunging myself into books of military strategy, training in fencing, and above all listening to the Virginian officers that make up my militia, men of experience who have known war.

My militia may be ill-equipped, but once armed they bravely defend that which they hold most dear: their land. We call them the 'minutemen', because they are capable of seizing their rifles and meeting up with their regiment in less than a minute.



Lawrence had this beautiful engraving of Mount Vernon made.

27th June 1754,

My war has started, and each day I understand a little better what a complex art it is. For my first mission, I was sent into the Ohio Valley with orders to give a message to the French. The message ordered them to pull out of our territory. I was courteously received by the French commander of Fort Leboeuf, a certain Monsieur Jacques Legardeur de Saint-Pierre.

Unfortunately, his good manners were matched by a categorical refusal to abide by our demands.

The situation degenerated further in February 1754 when the Canadians seized Prince George, the fort that we had built to reinforce our position in the valley.

In May, at Great Meadows, I was finally able to lead a real battle against these Canadian devils. The screaming whistle of bullets flying past me had something strangely captivating to it... We won, but unfortunately the Indian chief Half King accompanying us killed the French commanding officer of the opposing detachment with a throw of his tomahawk.

I am told that the French consider me responsible for the death of their officer, claiming he was one of their emissaries, and that they have sent a detachment of 500 men to find me.... It seems once again I will soon have the pleasure of hearing the whistle of their bullets!

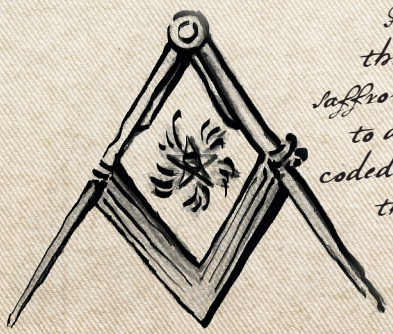
My soldiers: trappers, farmers, a few Indians... A motley collection of Virginians who share a common hatred for the French.

10th December 1754,

While visiting my Masonic Lodge in Fredericksburg, some militia officers introduced me to a British man who proclaims himself a specialist in intelligence.

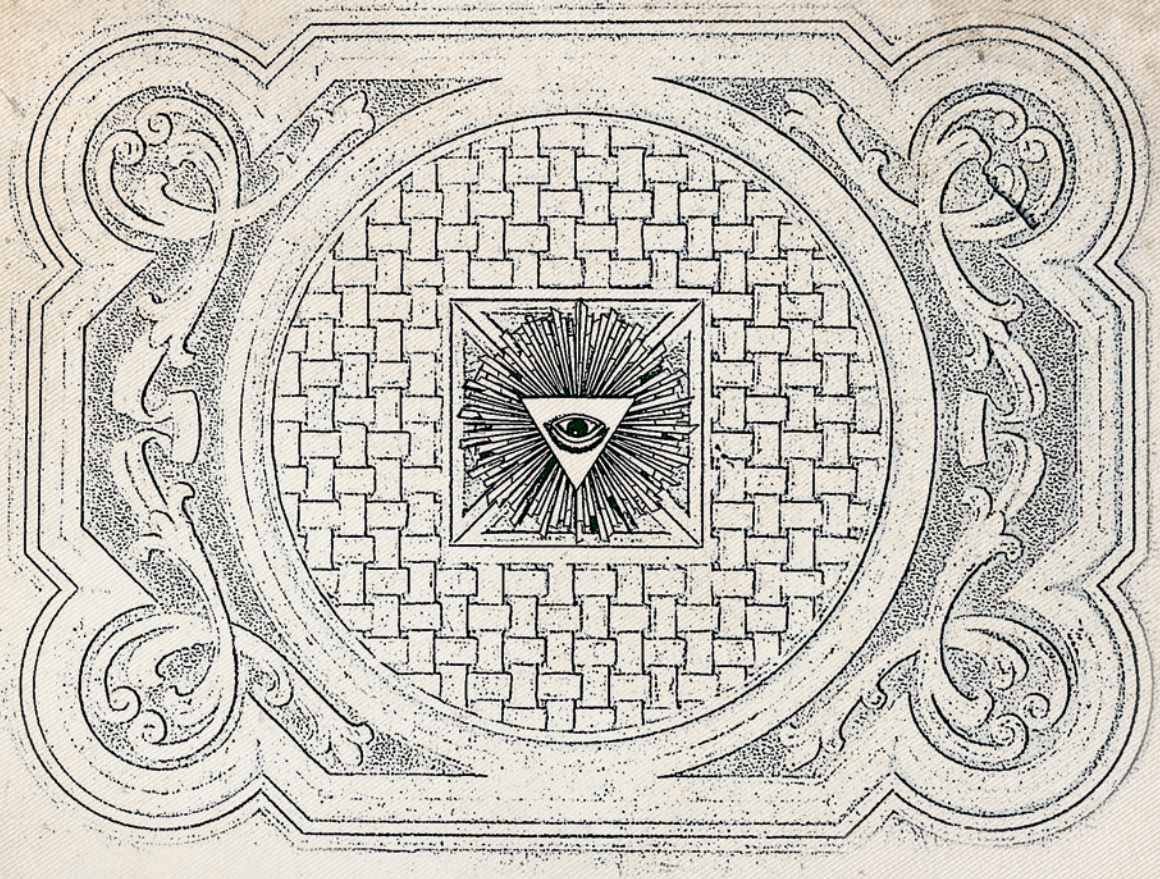
The difficulty I am having in gathering the necessary information for our expeditions has convinced me to listen to this man. For example, this spy has taught me a method for conveying secret messages – it requires placing a mask over a seemingly innocuous letter in order to make the real message appear.

An even safer method is code – the coded message is written using reference text that both the sender and recipient of the letter have in their possession.



For example, this text about saffron is enough to decypher the coded message on the next page.

Crocus Sativus saffron is a plant taken from the Orient.
This bulb grows in June and produces a flower that quickly sprouts three elongated stigmas.
The flowers are harvested by hand. Once the root has been separated and the stigmas dried, the latter are turned into a powder of great value. It allows for much freedom of use in cooking, and is much in demand as a spice or colorant that can be employed in medicinal preparations.



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15th July 1755,

Since the month of May, I have been General Braddock's aide-de-camp. This English soldier arrived in America at the beginning of the year to participate in the offensive against the French. I was hoping to learn from this experienced officer how to lead an army to victory... Instead, he helped me lead our men into the worst possible disaster.

We were surprised by the French and their Indian allies while crossing the Monongahela River, and the British strategy was completely useless in such wooded terrain. The French massacred us! When the general was seriously wounded, I was forced to organise our troops' retreat. Afterwards, we counted our losses: out of 1,500 men, 456 had been killed. I don't know why I survived. I found four bullets lodged in my coat, and two horses died under me during the battle.

General Braddock. His wounds were too severe. A bullet went clean through his arm and lodged itself in his lung. He died on the 13th.

15th March 1770,

I have just learned of the Boston massacre.
The irreparable has happened: the English have fired on the Americans! The peace we have known since 1763 is suddenly as faltering as a blind old dog.
The Americans feel exploited by the British Crown.

Voices are already being raised, asking for greater independence for the colonies! Mr. Benjamin Franklin in particular has written magnificent articles in the press that meet with growing favour amongst the population. In Mount Vernon I am happy, I am married to a wonderful woman, I have successfully farmed our lands and become a respected member of the Virginian House of Burgesses!

Will duty force me to abandon this happy life for a new war?

Benjamin Franklin published this drawing. The pieces of the snake symbolise the states. The legend says "Join, or Die." Indeed, if the pieces do not reunite, the snake will die...

The inhabitants of Boston.

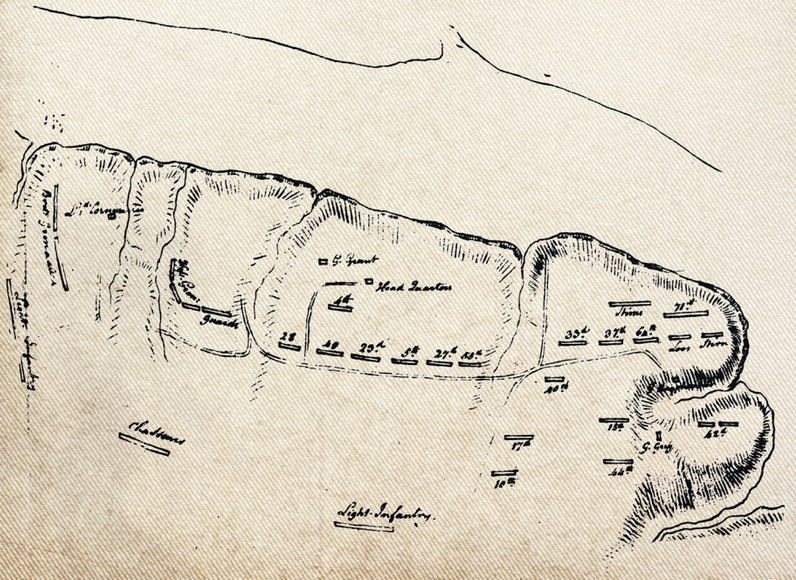
Obviously, they do not deserve all this suffering.

30th December 1773,

In Boston, a group known as the "Sons of Liberty" has thrown bales of tea into the sea, protesting against the unfair taxes imposed on us by England. Have tensions between the English and the Americans reached the point of no return?

7th April 1770,

Once again I have met with the Englishman, he who made me realise the importance of espionage in time of war. This time of course, we talked of espionage during peacetime. He is worried - it seems that extremely cunning spies are infiltrating the English camps around Boston. Recent tensions have given rise to many rumours concerning their identities...



18th June 1775,

This time, war will be against the English. They leave us no choice – the sword of a brother has been plunged into the chest of a brother. The plains of America, once happy and peaceful, must now either be covered with blood or inhabited by slaves. The alternatives are deplorable, but could any virtuous man really hesitate? This is why I accepted the post of chief commander of the union's armies yesterday at the Philadelphia congress' meeting. In such circumstances, it is a citizen's duty to answer the call of his country without question.

One of the brave men at the forefront of the Boston Tea Party in 1773. He is dead. I would have liked to meet him.

General Charles Lee.
This man will be of great worth to the nation in future conflicts. However, it is whispered that he coveted the post of Commander in Chief that has just been given to me. I hope I need not question his loyalty in this matter.

22nd June 1775,

I have arrived at the camp near Boston to which those who escaped the battle of Bunker Hill have fallen back. The men fought with admirable strength and courage in the hope of taking the town. They repelled the English attack twice, but lacking ammunition were obliged to give up when faced with a third attack.

I have found 14,000 men ready to fight, but am preoccupied by their unruliness and lack of discipline. I have seen weakened regiments with no permanent enrolment and insufficient firepower. They have no tents, no ambulances, not even gunpowder – only one barrel remains!

I must regain unflinching obedience from them, and request urgent means from congress!

5th June 1775,

I have been told tales of strange happenings at Bunker Hill. A man appeared – silent, rapid, unreal. He killed, then disappeared. No-one knows who he is. My spies have asked their contacts, but in vain. I have to find out!

30th March 1776

The English have finally evacuated Boston!

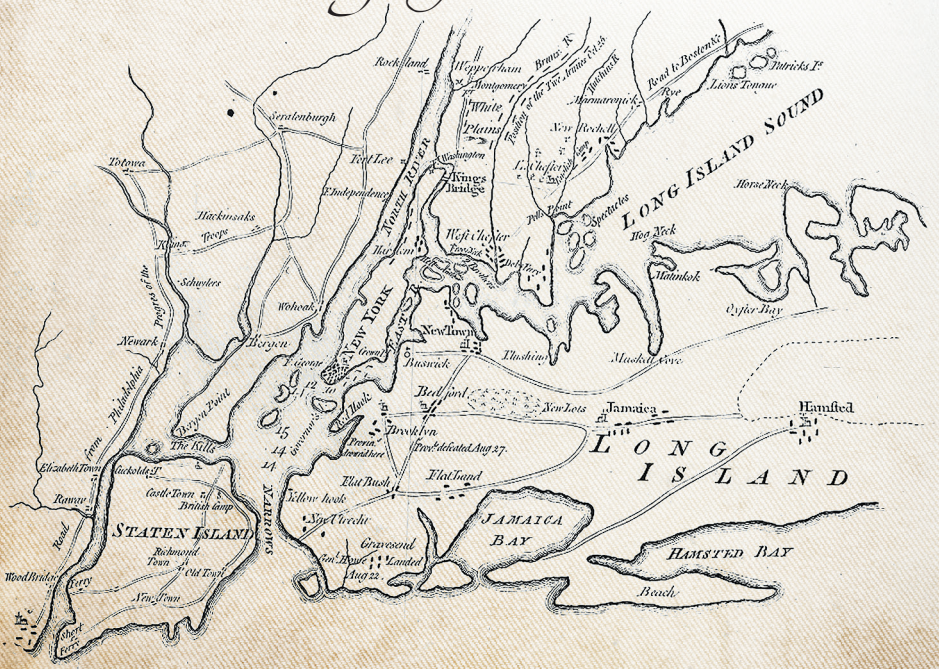
Up until the end of February, I desperately tried to find a strategy that would allow our poorly-armed forces to get rid of them, when at the end of the month, thankfully, Henry Knox arrived with the artillery, shells and munitions we needed. I had our cannons from Ticonderoga deployed at Lechmere's Point, as well as Cobble Hill and Lamb's Dam. On the 4th March, we launched an assault and seized the heights around Boston. The English fell back, allowing us to advance our artillery during the night and fortify our new positions. The men were exhausted, but I only had to remind them that 5th March was the anniversary of the Boston Massacre for their rage to bolster their strength.

The British tried to retake our positions several times, but our determination eventually led them to negotiate their evacuation. Following our agreement, they sailed off on the 17th without ever having been fired upon. Boston had been freed!

30th jun 1776;

I am preparing New York to withstand the enemy's next landing. As if this job were not enough, I also have to deal with the spies and traitors to our cause, and there are many of them in this town. I had to insist the provincial executive council form a secret committee, charged with seeking out and prosecuting the suspects. A hidden enemy is the worst possible kind, as it abandons honour and betrays the trust of an entire people!

I am also confronted by the strange case of General Lee. Despite my best efforts to appease him, this officer continues to challenge my command.



Thomas Hickey was executed on 28th June. He was one of my guards, an extremely poor choice by all accounts – apparently, the traitor was planning my assassination.

Another traitor – Dr. Benjamin Church. Not only did he tend poorly to our soldiers, but he was also sending coded messages back to the English, detailing the state of our forces!

7th September 1776,

Our victory at Boston must not make us foolhardy: holding New York will remain a perilous exercise. This city is almost an island, which means it is completely at the mercy of the cannons belonging to the huge British fleet. Will we be able to beat them on the coasts?

British sailors.
Often very tough, proud of their military discipline. An example to be studied.

English quartermaster.
The officer in charge of provisions.

War is upon Boston once again. I am told that the population is panicking. The most fantastical rumours circulate – some say that Indians have been seen invading the city from the rooftops!

20th November 1776,

Last July, congress adopted the Declaration of Independence of the United States. The principal author was Mr. Jefferson. This admirable man was able to express succinctly how righteous our fight is:

"Governments are instituted among Men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed. Whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it."

These words increase my determination to reverse the course of this conflict, following our retreat to New York and too many defeats!

English soldiers – better prepared, better armed and better trained than us. I hope to find them less tenacious than my compatriots.

25th December 1776,

Our current situation is disastrous – we have retreated to the River Delaware, crossing it and burning the bridges behind us. The English have set up camp on the other bank, no doubt waiting for the ice to thicken so they can cross and annihilate us.

I have decided not to wait for them. Tonight we shall surprise them, crossing the Delaware using every boat I have been able to find.

The English outnumber us, but their positions are too far apart. This is the moment to cut off the wings they have spread so wide...

Benedict Arnold.

This Connecticut general blocked the English, stopping their advance up the Hudson.

I hope to have the same success on the Delaware!

My men are all asking who is this man crossing the Delaware at my side. Obviously, it is impossible to tell them anything.

One of my soldiers...

4th January 1777,

The secret crossing of the River Delaware was a first success! We have just surpassed it with a fantastic victory at Princeton. And so we find ourselves the masters of New Jersey! I know that the war is still far from over, but these victories finally prove to the world that the United States of America can win. Confusion and fear will now gnaw away at the hearts of the English!

Alexander Hamilton, a brilliant young man. My aide-de-camp for four years, but very ambitious... and impatient.

Le Charleville musket is used by some of our troops. It is 5 feet long, weighs 10 pounds and its calibre is 8 French lines. They are fitted with bayonets, but our troops use them much less than the English.

13th October 1777,

When time allows, I like to go hunting. Riding in the woods around Valley Forge for much of the day, following the scent of a fox, is of much comfort to me. This autumn, during a hunt, I witnessed the most amazing spectacle. I was alone, having distanced my escort, when suddenly I saw a magnificent stag. I tied up my horse, continuing on foot in order to get within range with my rifle. At that moment, I realised that another hunter was also stalking the same prey. From a distance, it was impossible to make out who the man was. He moved with incredible ease, but also without any sound that might alert the animal to his presence. He carried a bow, but I could not be sure he was Indian. Drawing an arrow, the stag suddenly dropped to the ground. Though he was still very far from the animal, the arrow had struck it precisely in the eye. I was stunned by the almost supernatural precision of the man. At that moment, he noticed my presence and immediately abandoned his kill, disappearing into the woods. Why did he flee?

3rd March 1778,

My army has taken up winter quarters at Valley Forge. I am tired of constantly having to fight with congress in order for my soldiers to be fed and clothed correctly. For several days there was almost a famine in the camp, with soldiers naked and dying of hunger! I admire their patience and devotion, despite these extreme conditions.

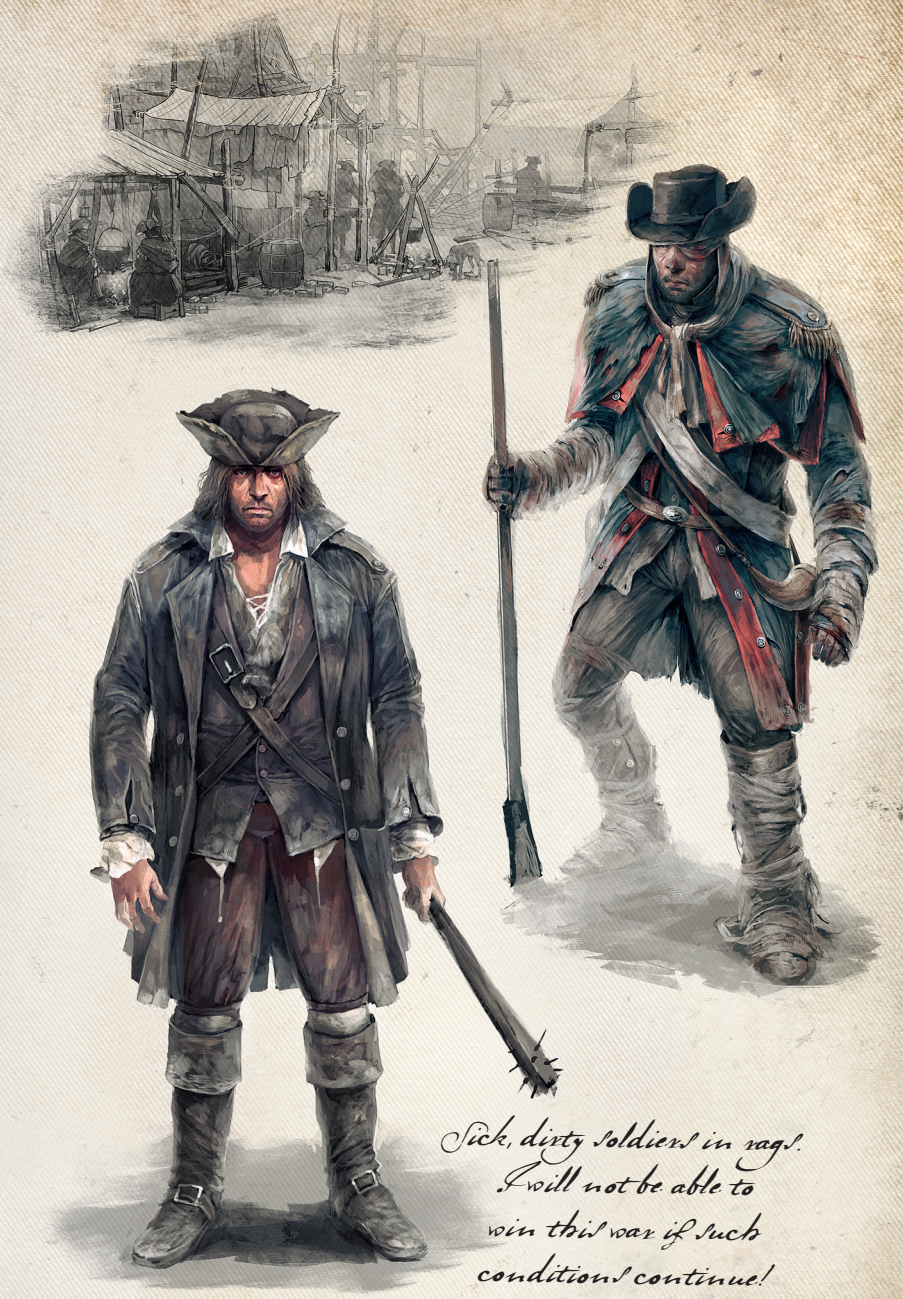
Since February, we have a Prussian officer called von Steuben in the camp. I have charged this man with setting up a training programme so that I may be able to depend on an effective army at last. Too many have already perished through lack of training. Von Steuben has pointed out, for example, that the men are incapable of fighting with bayonets, leading to many deaths during the battle of Bunker Hill.

Von Steuben.
I have high hopes for this Prussian.
We have tasked him with organising the training of our troops.

7th March 1779,

The situation is absurd!
Sickness and epidemic are killing more of my men than the blades of our enemies!
Even General Lee's disobedience did not cost me this many men!

Spurred by Von Steuben and Dr. Benjamin Rush, we are now building proper hospitals in our camps.
The reason is extremely simple – as soon as the ill are in a clean, dry building with a fire, the rate of recovery improves dramatically!
We must tell the officers how important it is that their men drink, eat, wash and rest properly.
Too many officers seem to neglect such matters.
Our soldiers are not simply mules that we lead into combat!



Sick, dirty soldiers in rags.
I will not be able to win this war if such conditions continue!

21st October 1781,

Our success at Yorktown has been more complete and more readily obtained than I could have hoped for. The five thousand soldiers that France sent us, together with the seven thousand American soldiers and our four thousand militia, have allowed us to conquer Yorktown in 20 days!!

The surrender agreement that we have signed with General Cornwallis leaves us in charge of the artillery, weapons, ships and English military funds. According to the rules of honour, the captured officers have been authorised to keep their swords.

I see the capture of such a large part of the English army as an extremely favourable omen for the end of our combat.

I would not have believed I could become friends with a Frenchman, and yet this is what has come to pass with the marquis de Lafayette. This man brilliantly led the American troops during the siege of Yorktown.

23rd May 1782,

I have often seen our flag fly over the heads of our troops, its thirteen stripes, red and white, its thirteen white stars representing a new constellation. This flag is something that has preoccupied me during all these years of war. It is the symbol of an entire country's freedom, a freedom that I have always tried to defend. I will not be the one to smother it!

Nevertheless, in this period of transition, the temptation is great. Some of my officers have asked me to lead a coup d'état. They wish to make me the king of the United States!

I reacted to their proposition with a mix of extreme surprise and painful astonishment. What could I have done to encourage such a proposition?

The courageous Betsy Ross sewed the first American flag in Philadelphia in 1777.

24th July 1788,

No man wishes more sincerely than I to see us take the path, some day, toward the abolition of slavery.

It seems obvious that, step after step, our country has to evolve in order for these practices to disappear.

Personally, I intend for my slaves to be given their freedom upon my passing.

Mr. Benjamin Franklin, a man of numerous talents: philosopher, physicist, inventor... I have been much affected by his writings in favour of the abolition of slavery.

30th April 1789,

The people have chosen me. I am to be the first president of the United States. I must say goodbye to Mount Vernon, my private life and domestic happiness. Seized by feelings sadder and more painful than I have the words to express, I am leaving for New York, ready to serve my country by answering its call... but with little hope of meeting its expectations.

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